

Journalism 501 – Print Newswriting

Fall 2007

Monday 3:00- 5:40 pm

ASC 330

Marc Cooper

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of this course aims to build and refine your writing, reporting and critical thinking skills, as well as teach you about news and journalism ethics.

USC's Core Convergence Curriculum begins with news writing. We believe it is easier to teach students how to be good reporters after they've had a chance to learn about what makes a story newsworthy, what elements should be included in basic news stories, and what elements should be included in specific types of news stories. That means at first you will use fact sheets to complete your print assignments. Very soon into the semester you will begin reporting your own stories, learning proper interviewing, research and story generation techniques. You will also learn to write under deadline.

The course focus will move from news judgment, to construction and writing of increasingly complex news stories. You must complete every assignment in accord with the ABC principles of journalism: Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity.

You are required to come to class on time, prepared (i.e., having done your readings and homework assignments, and followed the news), and ready to discuss various news-related topics.

You learn best by doing. So expect weekly in-class and take-home writing assignments. Be prepared to do considerable fieldwork and reporting. This class must be approached with a sense of discipline and commitment or you will not be successful.

All homework assignments must be brought into class in hard copy. I will not accept your homework via email unless I have asked you to do so

Typing skills are essential in this course. You must be able to use a computer, type fast, and use Word. When working on a computer, save often, make a back-up copy of your work, and print it out at various stages of the writing process. Always keep a hard copy for yourself. Claims that "the computer lost it" will not be accepted as an excuse.

In order to report your stories in the field, you will need reliable personal transportation i.e. a car. Relying exclusively on public transportation will make completing the course extremely difficult. By the end of this course you should be able to walk into any small newsroom in the country and write a basic 750 -word hard news story for publication on deadline in a clear, concise, accurate and fair manner. You should have a clear idea of the basics of news reporting.

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

I have reported for print and broadcast media for more than 30 years from around the country and across the world. My articles, essays and interviews have appeared in publications ranging from The New Yorker, The Atlantic and Harper's to the L.A. Times, Playboy, and Rolling Stone. I have produced and/or reported TV news documentaries for the Christian Science Monitor, PBS Frontline and CBS News. I'm the author of three non-fiction books, including the L.A. Times best-seller "Pinochet and Me." I'm Associate Director of Annenberg's Institute for Justice and Journalism.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

1. Title: Inside Reporting/A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism

Author: Tim Harrower
ISBN: 0-07-352614-2

2. Title: Course Reader for JOUR 202/203/501

Publisher: USC Bookstore

3. Title: Associated Press Stylebook (2004 edition)

Author: Norm Goldstein
ISBN: 0465004881

4. Title: Creative Interviewing

Author: Ken Metzler
Publisher: Allyn & Bacon

5. Dictionary: Merriam Webster, www.m-w.com

This is the dictionary that should be used for all assignments, midterms and finals.

DAILY NEWS READINGS/CURRENT EVENTS QUIZZES

As journalism students you will be expected to keep abreast with international, national and local current events and hard news. If you have a phobia about reading the daily newspaper, you might consider changing your course of study. Every week you will have a current events quiz based on reporting in sections A, B, and C of the daily Los Angeles Times. Set aside an hour a day or more for reading the paper.

AP STYLE QUIZZES

Your assignments must be completed adhering to the standards found in the Associated Press Stylebook. After studying each section of the book, there will be an in-class, open-book quiz. Expect a total of four to six AP style quizzes over the course of the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA

Your assignments will consist of in-class writing exercises, homework news stories, and originally reported news stories. Expect at least one major story per work, or two to four minor stories.

You must turn in assignments on the day they are due. You must bring a properly formatted, clean, hard copy to class. You will not be allowed to print your homework out in class, have it ready before you arrive. Even if you know you will miss class and have contacted me beforehand your homework is still due. Send it to me via MS Word e-mail attachment. The story must arrive by the beginning of that day's class session (3 p.m. on Monday) or it will be considered a late assignment.

Late assignments will be graded as an F. However, you are required to complete them anyway so I can edit them and provide feedback on your progress. Uncompleted late assignments i.e. missing assignments, will be counted as a ZERO.

If you miss class, it is up to you to contact someone in the class (another student, not me) to find out what you've missed and what's due next.

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis. Each story will be returned with written comments and explanations of any editing that is more than routine. Our style guide will be "The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual."

Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. There should not be any omissions, either. Any misspelled proper noun (even if it's due to a typographical error) or any inaccuracy will result in an automatic "F" on that assignment. Accuracy is the first law of journalism. Professional journalists are expected to get their facts right, to spell and punctuate correctly, and to respect grammar and syntax. In case of doubt, check your facts, consult the AP Stylebook or a dictionary. It only takes a minute or two to avoid mistakes.

Please don't be discouraged if your writing receives low grades at the beginning of the semester. Your grades will improve. News writing is hard work, but the only way to get better is to keep writing, regardless of the difficulties. I'm more concerned with how you do in the final weeks of the course than how you do in the first weeks of the course. Grades on assignments in the first four weeks will not be counted in the final grade for the course. Student assignments will be graded on news judgment, clarity, completeness/omissions, accuracy, grammar, and adherence to AP Style.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

"A" stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well-written and require only minor editing (i.e., they are publishable).

"B" stories require more than minor editing, and have a few style or minor spelling errors or an error of omission.

"C" stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many minor spelling and style errors.

"D" stories require excessive rewriting; have numerous minor spelling and style errors, and should not have been submitted.

"F" stories have at least one proper name misspelled, and/or one factual error.

COURSE GRADES

Your course grade will be determined as follows:

Assignments	45%
AP Stylebook quizzes	10%
Current events summaries	25 %
Final news story	20%
Total	100%

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity, and a student found guilty of plagiarism is subject to dismissal from the journalism major.

The following is the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the University catalogue

Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to this policy. In short, don't even think about it. If I can't immediately recognize copied text, Google can.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected to be in class every week. In-class assignments and quizzes can't be made-up.

Although the syllabi are similar, every core class is different and students can't make-up a class by going to another core class in the same sequence. For example, if a student misses his regular Monday print class, he can't go to a Tuesday print class.

If you are going to miss a class for some unavoidable reason, please advise me in advance.

TAPE RECORDER:

You will be expected to purchase a simple portable tape recorder or digital voice recorder to conduct the interviews necessary for this class. This is a must.

PROFESSIONAL DRESS CODE

For the purposes of this class, you are a bona fide member of the working press. You should expect to be treated with all of the normal courtesies and privileges afforded to the press. In return, you are expected to represent the profession in a dignified and appropriate manner. If you do not take yourself seriously, be advised that no one else will. While conducting interviews and field research for this class you are expected to dress in proper business attire.

WRITING COACHES

Writing coaches are available in ASC 227 during posted drop-in times and by appointment. Writing coaches should be used to review assignments AFTER an assignment has been graded/marked-up by the instructor i.e. the coach is not there to do your homework for you. Students are required to review at least four stories with a writing coach. Two of the stories must be reviewed before week 8/midterm point, and two after. That said, you are greatly encouraged to see the coach as often as once a week. This personalized coaching is integral to your advancement and you eschew it at your own peril. Please contact the coaches as soon as possible to set up a regular meeting program.

Bob Berger: rberger@usc.edu

Ed Boyer: edjboyer@ca.rr.com

DISABILITY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301. Its phone number is 213-740-0776.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – AUGUST 27

Class Topics:

Review syllabus. Copy Preparation. Using the AP Stylebook. What is convergence?
What is News?

Homework/Reading Assignments: TBA

SPJ Ethics Statement (http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp)]

WEEK 2 – SEPTEMBER 3 LABOR DAY (UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY)

WEEK 3 – SEPT. 10 LABOR DAY (UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY)

Class Topics:

What is a lead? Direct, delayed and anecdotal leads. Datelines, quotes and attribution, and how to use them.

Homework/ Reading Assignments: TBA

WEEK 4 - SEPT. 17

Class Topics:

Review direct and indirect leads. Multi-element leads. Building the basic news story; nut graphs and how to use them. Basic obits.

Assignments: TBA

WEEK 5 - SEPT. 24

Class Topics: Basic interviewing techniques; asking the right questions. Investigative listening. Assembling story components.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 6 – October 1

Class Topics: Review story structure. The loaded-up nut. Dazzling quotes. Covering speeches. Developing a reporting beat. Using census info. Developing a source Rolodex.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 7 – OCT. 8

Class Topics: General review. In-class writing drills.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 8 - OCT. 15

Class Topics: Covering and writing about local government. Writing a local news brief; interviewing public officials.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 9 - OCT. 22

Class Topics: Covering and writing about cops and courts. Writing the longer form news story. General review of story structure.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 10 – OCT. 29

Class Topics: Writing and reporting news profiles. On-deadline news conferences.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 11 – NOVEMBER 5

Class Topics: Digging beneath the surface. Peeling back the onion and getting the scoop. Questions of fairness, objectivity and diversity.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 12 - NOV. 12

Class Topics: Justice and Journalism. Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. Preparing to write a news feature.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 13 - NOV. 19

Class Topics: Completing a major news feature report. General review for final. Writing under deadline exercise.

Homework Assignments: TBA

WEEK 14 - NOV. 26

Class Topics: Comprehensive review for final paper.

Homework Assignments: TBA

Readings: TBA

WEEK 15 – December 3

Final paper due in class.